

Piedmont Charcoal Kilns
15 miles southwest of Fort Bridger
Piedmont
Uinta County
Wyoming

HABS No. WYO-68

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21 - PIED,
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

PIEDMONT CHARCOAL KILNS

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Location: 15 miles southwest of Fort Bridger, Piedmont, Uinta County, Wyoming.
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: (USGS Hague Creek Quadrangle Map) 12.531960.4563010.

Present Owner: The State of Wyoming.

Present Occupant: None.

Present Use: Historic Site.

Statement of Significance: The Piedmont Charcoal Kilns are outstanding examples of a type of structure once commonly found in southwestern Wyoming. Built in 1869 by Moses Byrne, these kilns were constructed to process charcoal for use in the early mining smelters of Colorado and Utah. Their prosperity and that of the town were closely associated with the development of the transcontinental transportation system.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1869.
2. Architect: None known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: It has not been possible to obtain a chain of title for these structures. The Office of the Clerk of Uinta County, Uinta County Courthouse, Evanston, Wyoming, has not yet provided the title. The kilns were built by Moses Byrne, but it is not certain whether he ever held title to the land on which they were built. The State of Wyoming now holds title to the site.
4. Original plans and construction: There is no evidence to show that the original appearance of the kilns differed in any way from their present appearance. They are rounded cones built of field stone, resembling beehives, and constructed along a NE-SW axis. Each has an arched entrance facing southeast, a high "window" facing northwest, and two rows of regularly

spaced vent holes around the perimeter a few feet from the ground. Traditionally, the process of making charcoal involved filling the kilns with suitable wood, blocking the major openings, igniting the wood and controlling the fire by means of the vents. The "windows" were probably used to fill the kiln to the top with wood.

5. Alterations and additions: Two of the kilns built by Byrne fell into disrepair over the years. One of these has been rebuilt. The stone used to build the kiln originally was used in the reconstruction. Consequently, the interior of the reconstruction is as blackened as the others.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The town of Piedmont began as a settlement of twenty tents, two or three years before the transcontinental railroad came through. It was a logging center which brought wood in from the Uinta Mountains a few miles distant and supplied the Union Pacific with railroad ties.

The first permanent residents were the families of Charles Guild and Moses Byrne. Byrne had previously built and managed the Overland Stage Station at Muddy Creek. He apparently anticipated the arrival of railroad transportation and abandoned the stage station before it became obsolete. At first the town was known as "Byrne," but as it was often confused with Bryan Station, the name was changed to Piedmont, after the birthplace of both Mrs. Byrne and Mrs. Guild. When the commercial lumber business became the mainstay of the town's economy, the enterprising Byrne built his four kilns, shipping charcoal to smelters in both Colorado and Utah, to the Union Pacific, and supplying nearby restaurants with cooking fuel.

Piedmont experienced a brief period of notoriety in 1869. With the completion of the transcontinental railroad, the Golden Spike Ceremony uniting the two companies was scheduled to take place on May 7, 1869, at Promontory, Utah. Three hundred track workers were dismissed at Piedmont with several hundred thousand dollars pay outstanding. Rumors began to spread that the Union Pacific was about to go bankrupt. The west-bound train carrying a company representative to Promontory, (Vice President Thomas C. Durant) was stopped at Piedmont and held there by the workers until they were paid. It took several days for the money to arrive and so the ceremony at Promontory was delayed until Monday, May 10.

Following the completion of the transcontinental railroad, Piedmont became more established. Byrne built some lime kilns near town to provide wall and ceiling plaster for the new houses and commercial buildings under construction. In 1900 the Union Pacific began an energetic campaign to upgrade the track. The Piedmont route was abandoned in favor of a new route through the Aspen Tunnel. Almost immediately Piedmont ceased to function as a commercial center. For some years it lingered on in much diminished form. By the middle of the twentieth century it had become a ghost town, a few ramshackle structures remain, contrasting sharply to the solidity of the kilns.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Research File, Wyoming Recreation Commission, Cheyenne, Wyoming, including the following material: National Register Nomination Form, completed by Bill Barnhart, Fall, 1967; anonymous one page essay, "A Brief History of the Piedmont Charcoal Kilns;" anonymous one page essay, "Charcoal Kilns."

2. Secondary and published sources:

Adams and Bishop, The Pacific Tourist/Illustrated Trans-Continental Guide, 1885, Adams & Bishop, New York.

Croffutt, Croffutt's New Overland Tourist and Pacific Coast Guide, 1882, Overland Publishing Company, Omaha, Denver.

Croffutt, Croffutt's Trans-Continental Tourist's Guide, 1869, American News Company, New York.

Stuart, Cliff, "Railroad Towns were Tough!", Old West, Spring, 1971, p. 20.

Prepared by John Hnedak
Historian
National Park Service
Summer 1974

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: These charcoal kilns, built in 1869, represent an unusual conical construction of native sandstone

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laid up with lime-sand mortar that was produced in abundance in the area.

2. Condition of fabric: Fair to good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: 30'-2" in diameter and 25'-0" in height, this conical structure has a circular base, curved sides, and the general convex shape of a beehive.
2. Foundations: Stone.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: Light tan native sandstone.
4. Structural system, framing: Stones laid up in coursed and uncoursed layers to form a conical dome.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: There is an arched doorway on the southeast facade of the kiln. This doorway is 6'-2" high and 5'-7" wide.
 - b. Windows and shutters: High on the northwest facade, there is an arched window opening 3' high and 3' wide.
6. Roof: The walls of the structure curve from a circular base to form a conical stone dome.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The large circular area which acted as an oven, is approached through the arched opening on the southeast. There are two rows of air vents made by omission of stones near the base.
2. Flooring: Compacted earth.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: Native sandstone with a heavy layer of carbon.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The kiln faces onto a country road on the northwest, on a site with two other kilns and a

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ruin. The site is enclosed by a wire fence. There is a small creek, Byrne No. 2 ditch, between the fence and the road. A wooden foot bridge crosses the creek. Natural prairie surrounds the kilns.

2. Outbuildings: A granite marker has been erected on the site to commemorate the historical significance of the kilns.

Prepared by John P. White
Project Supervisor
National Park Service
Summer 1974

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in cooperation with the State of Wyoming through the Wyoming Recreation Commission and was financed with funds provided by the Wyoming State Legislature. This project was under the general direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, and was completed during the summer of 1974 at the Historic American Buildings Survey Field Office, Cheyenne, Wyoming. Professor John P. White (Texas Tech University) was the Project Supervisor and John D. Hnedak (Cornell University) was the Project Historian. Student Assistant Architects who prepared the measured drawings were Thomas L. Amis, Jr. (University of Texas, Austin), Stephen O. Fildes (Texas Tech University), John T. Reddick (Yale University), and Paul Wheeler (University of Idaho). Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer, provided the photographic records. This report was edited for HABS in 1977 by Candace Reed.

ADDENDUM TO:

PIEDMONT CHARCOAL KILNS

15 miles southwest of Fort Bridger

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